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Housekeeper's Chat

Monday, August 4, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Tea Time Topics". Information from George F. Mitchell, formerly Supervising Tea Examiner, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and menu from Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available:

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Giving a formal afternoon tea may be a splendid way to cancel a lot of social debts, but it's not my idea of a good time, either for the hostess or for most of her guests, and especially for the kind friends who consent to "pour."

"Gabble, gobble, and git" teas, the men call them. The only big teas I ever enjoyed were at the White House, where there was a wonderful feeling about being "among those present", as well as the glimpse of beautiful, historic rooms, exquisite flowers, and lovely gowns.

But since for most of us a tea at the White House is usually out of the question what I like much better is just serving tea at home to a few friends at a time, in the late afternoon, when I feel I have earned a bit of relaxation. In winter it is hot tea, of course, in front of an open fire; in summer, it's iced tea on the shady side of the porch.

Do you know of anything better calculated to revive wilted spirits on a hot afternoon, than a dainty tray set with glasses and "fixin's" for iced tea? A glass pitcher, tinkling with ice, floating in golden brown liquid, garnished with colorful green leaves. Close by, a plate of thin slices of lemon, and don't forget the lemon fork, if you have one. Powdered sugar in a pleasing bowl, and saucers or small plates to set the tea glasses on and the spoon after the tea is stirred. They are needed, too, if you pass cookies or sandwiches. Iced beverages have a way of collecting moisture on the outside, so an under-plate of some sort is a necessity to protect your guests' dresses.

I asked Mr. George F. Mitchell, formerly Supervising Tea Examiner of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to give me some suggestions on choosing tea and particularly on making iced tea properly.

He says: "The housewife should determine whether she wants to use the fully fermented, black tea, green tea, or Oolong tea. Americans seem to be gradually shifting to the heavy-bodied, fully fermented black teas of East India and Ceylon, rather than the green teas of China and Japan and the Oolong teas of Formosa and China. We are a coffee-drinking nation, and these heavy teas resemble coffee in color and body. They are liked for iced tea because even when they are diluted by melting ice they still have considerable flavor and a delightful color..

"After the housewife knows the kind that she likes, she should then select the brand of tea that is sold in the proper kind of package, which will preserve the quality of the tea. This is very important. Teas are best packed in tin, or cartons lined inside with aluminum or lead, or transparent airtight material. Tea packed in unlined cartons loses its flavor very rapidly, and is a poor buy."

"Is there any way to tell from the tea leaves whether one has chosen a good brand?" I asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Mitchell. "After brewing tea, if you examine the wet leaves you can tell something about quality. If the leaf of black tea, after brewing, has the bright color of a new copper coin, it is sure to be better quality than if it is a dull olive drab. Likewise, the leaves of green tea left in the teapot should be clear in color and not spotted. It is only after tea leaves are wet that color is any indication of quality, to anybody but a tea expert."

"What is meant by 'Orange Pekoe'?" I inquired next. "Is that a nice kind of tea?"

"The term 'Orange Pekoe' does not indicate a certain kind of tea, but only a leaf grade. In England, where everybody drinks tea, neither dealers nor buyers pay any attention to leaf grade. As a rule, blends of leaf grades have more body than a single leaf grade."

"Now please tell me which kind of tea to use for iced tea," was the next thing I asked.

"That's a matter of personal preference," Mr. Mitchell assured me. "If you like full-bodied black tea hot, then you'll prefer that kind for icing. No one can deny the pleasing amber color of black tea, made fresh and poured over cracked ice. It is best to brew tea for icing about 4 or 5 minutes."

"You start making iced tea by making the hot tea in the usual way. When it has steeped long enough, pour it off the leaves into an earthenware pitcher or teapot, and chill it. Have I answered all your questions?"

"Yes, I think so," I answered. "That is, all but one. But it's the most important of all. Exactly how do you recommend making tea, Mr. Mitchell?"

"Use a teapot, preferably of earthenware, china, or glass. Heat it by scalding it with boiling water. As the strength of tea is partly a matter of individual preference, the amount of tea used may vary from the standard quantity which is usually about a teaspoonful of tea to each cup desired. This may be interpreted as an even or a rounded teaspoonful after you have made tea once or twice from your chosen brand. If tea bags are used, one per cup is ordinarily allowed. In some cases the bags may contain more tea than in others, or the tea may have a heavier body, so it is well to test results with one bag before using a great many. Always use freshly drawn water for making tea. Measure it and bring it to a bubbling boil before pouring it on the tea leaves. Water boiled too long makes tea flat. If the water is not actually boiling, tea has an insipid taste. Steep 3 to 4 minutes for clear tea, 4 to 5 minutes to serve with cream or milk or for iced tea," concluded M. Mitchell.

And now we have just enough time, I think, for a luncheon or supper menu featuring iced tea. Will you write it down? Ready?

Cheese Toast with Bacon; Salad of thin slices of tomato on very dainty rings of onion, on lettuce, with either French or mayonnaise dressing seasoned with grated horseradish; Iced tea; fresh fruit and cookies.

The recipe for the Cheese Toast is in the radio cook book. The salad, if you like raw onion, is very nippy. And if you don't, you can leave it out. If you haven't any mint leaves to garnish your iced tea, use a geranium leaf. The fragrant kind.

And, by the way, when you are making fruit punch for a large number of people you can improve the flavor and use less of the other ingredients by having cold tea for part of the liquid. From a fourth to a third of the entire amount of liquid in the punch may be tea, depending on what the other flavors are.

Tuesday: "Wash Day Fads and Fancies."

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